



This Is How It Always Is

Laurie Frankel

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This is how a family keeps a secret...and how that secret ends up keeping them.

This is how a family lives happily ever after...until happily ever after becomes complicated.

This is how children change...and then change the world.

This is Claude. He's five years old, the youngest of five brothers, and loves peanut butter sandwiches. He also loves wearing a dress, and dreams of being a princess.

When he grows up, Claude says, he wants to be a girl.

Rosie and Penn want Claude to be whoever Claude wants to be. They're just not sure they're ready to share that with the world. Soon the entire family is keeping Claude's secret. Until one day it explodes.

This Is How It Always Is is a novel about revelations, transformations, fairy tales, and family. And it's about the ways this is how it always is: Change is always hard and miraculous and hard again, parenting is always a leap into the unknown with crossed fingers and full hearts, children grow but not always according to plan. And families with secrets don't get to keep them forever.

"This is a novel everyone should read. It's brilliant. It's bold. And it's time."

?Elizabeth George, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *A Banquet of Consequences*

This Is How It Always Is Details

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Download and Read Free Online This Is How It Always Is Laurie Frankel

Emily May says

*“Well. Usually boys don’t wear dresses to preschool,” Rosie admitted carefully. “Or tights.”
“I’m not usually,” said Claude. This, Rosie reflected, even at the time, was true.*

I've been going back and forth on whether I wanted to read this for a while. On the one hand, the premise interested me, the critics' reviews have been gushing, and the average GR rating is impressive. On the other hand, the few negative reviews have been calling it words like "sentimental", and even Kirkus begrudgingly admitted that it is "cloying at times". Those are two things that can turn me off a book right away.

But, for whatever reason, *This is How It Always Is* was the exception to the rule.

Is it sentimental? I mean, sure, maybe... but it was also a **deeply emotional reading experience** for me, too. Is it sweet, nice, neat? I would argue not. There is much in this book that warmed my heart, but to dismiss its struggles as too easy, too nice and too easily solved is to dismiss the gender dysphoria and violent transphobia as something that is easy.

At its heart, *This is How It Always Is* is a book about all seven members of the Walsh-Adams family. I love family drama/saga style books so this was right up my alley. They are a loving, hilarious, complex and dysfunctional family, all trying to do right by one another (and screwing up many times along the way). **I was utterly charmed.**

After four boys, Rosie and Penn are sure their fifth child will be a girl... until Claude arrives. It will be a few more years before they realize that their first predictions weren't exactly wrong. Drawing from her own experiences, the author explores how the family reacts to the realization that Claude (now Poppy) is transgender. Rosie and Penn instinctively try to protect their child by moving to the supposedly more liberal Seattle. However, instead of celebrating who Poppy is, they keep it a secret and urge her brothers to do the same.

Like most secrets, the weight of hiding Poppy bears down on all of them, especially Poppy herself. The characters note the irony that they are hiding the "fake" Poppy, and the real Poppy is the one her schoolmates and neighbours have known all along. Eventually, of course, everything blows up in their faces.

I found it very easy to become absorbed in the story. I became angry at the transphobic and homophobic comments made by kids and adults, and frustrated at the smaller acts of misunderstanding as the Wisconsin teachers tried to accommodate a trans student whilst still enforcing the gender binary:

“Little boys do not wear dresses.” Miss Appleton tried to channel her usual patience. “Little girls wear dresses. If you are a little boy, you can’t wear a dress. If you are a little girl, you have to use the nurse’s bathroom.”

“Meaning if he is a girl, he has gender dysphoria, and we will accommodate that. If he just wants to wear a dress, he is being disruptive and must wear normal clothes.”

Frankel highlights an ongoing problem in which schools try to recognize trans students but still demand they check one box or another, and adopt the expected characteristics of the selected "male" or "female". The ultimate issue is about more than accepting someone with XY chromosomes as a girl; it is also about being able to accept someone with facial hair and a deep voice as a girl, or as both a girl and boy, or as neither.

"This is a medical issue, but mostly it's a cultural issue. It's a social issue and an emotional issue and a family dynamic issue and a community issue. Maybe we need to medically intervene so Poppy doesn't grow a beard. Or maybe the world needs to learn to love a person with a beard who goes by 'she' and wears a skirt."

This is *How It Always Is* is an emotive read, but it also explores a lot of practical issues. Like the decisions parents can and cannot, should and should not, make for trans kids. Or kids in general. Throughout, Penn keeps up a long-running fairytale of Grumwald and Stephanie, painting in some rather obvious messages and parallels for his kids, which I suppose is what some would consider "sickly sweet" but hell, if he isn't the best dad ever.

I loved them all. I loved Rosie and her scientist's logic as a way of dealing with problems. I loved Penn and his sweet romanticism and hopefulness. I loved messed-up Roo and all his mistakes. I loved precocious Ben and how much he cares for Poppy. I loved the goofy twins who offered so much light and cheer in this book. And I loved Poppy. Of course I loved Poppy.

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Larry H says

I'm about 4.5, maybe 4.75 stars.

Penn and Rosie fell in love almost instantaneously. Penn was a writer forever working on his "damned novel," while Rosie worked as an emergency room doctor forever on the night shift. When they decided to have children, especially as their family grew to four boys, they adopted a tandem approach to parenting—"It was just that there was way more to do than two could manage, but by their both filling every spare moment, some of what needed to get done."

One final try for a girl landed them Claude. Claude was precocious—he crawled, walked, and talked earlier than his brothers, but he also was tremendously creative. He liked to write, draw, play music, even bake. He was warm, friendly, and truly a special child. But as Claude approached his fifth birthday, he became obsessed with dresses. What he wanted more than anything was to be a princess, and be able to wear a dress to school.

Rosie and Penn aren't sure what to do. Do they nurture their youngest son's wish, stares and cruel comments and jibes at their parenting be damned, or do they explain to Claude that boys don't wear dresses, and he is a boy? For a while Claude settles for dressing as a boy for school and changing into girl clothes when he returns home, but that really doesn't make him happy. He wants to be a girl.

"How did you teach your small human that it's what's inside that counts when the truth was everyone was pretty preoccupied with what you put on over the outside too?"

As Claude grows, and becomes Poppy, they encourage her to be true to her feelings and who she is. But is that the right parenting choice for a child so young in age? What are the next steps in this journey, not only for Poppy and her parents, but her brothers as well? At some point the burden of keeping Poppy's secret becomes too much to bear for everyone, and then everyone needs to figure out where to go from there.

What choice is the right one? How will Penn and Rosie know if they're acting in their child's best interests, or the best interests of all of their children? How do they protect their child from what they know the world always seems to have in store for people who are different?

Laurie Frankel's *This Is How It Always Is* is a truly wonderful book. She draws you into the Walsh-Adams family so fully, that you really see how things affect each of them. The book isn't preachy or heavy-handed (although those who believe transgender people to be less than human, and that no matter what you always must remain the gender you're born into will probably not agree), but it also doesn't pretend the whole situation is perfect, for anyone. She emphasizes that it's just as easy to make mistakes by not doing or saying things as it is by doing or saying them.

Frankel is a tremendously talented writer who imbues her books with beautiful emotion. Her previous book, *Goodbye for Now* (see my review), had me in tears (and I read it a few years before my father died). Frankel even brings emotion to her author's note. But this small exchange in the book moved me the most:

"Tears crawled out of Claude's eyes and nose, and besides he was only five, but he tried to comfort his parents anyway. 'I just feel a little bit sad. Sad isn't bleeding. Sad is okay.'"

Maybe sometimes things happened a little too easily, but I still loved this book. Read it.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo....>

Brooke says

I'm really conflicted on the rating for *THIS IS HOW IT ALWAYS IS* because on the one hand it's great that this book has so many positives & doesn't end on a pessimistic tone; we need LGBTQIAP+ stories that don't end in tragedy. (We need more of these books in general.) On the other hand, at times, there were such unrealistic situations taking place that I was wondering if the author was living in fantasyland- you'd have to suspend disbelief to enjoy it. It's clear that this is a personal story for Frankel, even though she makes it clear this isn't based off one specific person (her daughter) or her own experiences. With that in mind, perhaps this is truly what Frankel wishes for herself & the world which is wonderful, but it's not peachy keen for many families, & that's where I got a bit distraught. At its core though I did like this story so 3* it is.

The greatest thing that felt unrealistic to me:

- Rosie & Penn. They are such supportive parents! (I wish this was the case for everyone!) They are protective & move the family across state lines for safety reasons. Many families cannot afford to just leave when the going gets tough; safety reasons include a father who discloses he doesn't want his son to play with f***. (Other than this family, there is no blatant violence against them that is really threatening, for the most part people understand or don't know.) Then when Claude's secret is revealed, Rosie takes Claude to Thailand. Again, most people can't just pack up & go across the globe. It is for Rosie's job, but still. It doesn't ring authentic.

The ending wrapped up way too nicely for me, like everything was going to be hunky-dory. I liked how Claude decides they are nonconforming & they are more than what has been offered, but honestly, to get to that point wasn't worth it. Frankel's prose wavered my interest- I thought the middle was strong while the beginning & end were on the verge of a snooze fest. I would have liked to see more from Roo & Ben & a more thorough discussion on hormone blockers.

THIS IS HOW IT ALWAYS IS is a good start. By no means is it perfect but it opens the door for important conversations. More books like this need to make their way onto shelves & into hearts. Slowly but surely, we are doing just that.

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From reader reviews:

Nathan Herr:

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